



Volume 1, Issue 2

June 2008



## Alexandria hosts Second Annual Louisiana Citizen Corps Conference

The city of Alexandria, Louisiana and the Clarion Hotel hosted the second annual State Citizen Corps Conference on February 21st and 22nd, followed by a two-day CERT course on the 23rd and 24th. Though the conference experienced agenda changes before it even began, it moved forward with enthusiasm and motivation.

Over the two-day conference, several distinguished speakers took the podium to explain the role of volunteers in emergency response. The guests included Janet Pace, the Director of Volunteer Outreach for the Louisiana Serve Commission (LA-SERV), who spoke about best practices for volunteer recruitment. Dr. Stuart Stewart of the Louisiana Campus Compact spoke about the value of establishing a CERT program on college campuses. Jackie Snelling of the National



Citizen Corps program spoke on the importance of returning a community to normalcy with volunteers after an event. As recovery work cannot be completed by government alone, volunteers contributions are mandatory. The VIPS program received its due when national Program Manager Nancy Kolb spoke on the importance of volunteers in law enforcement. She emphasized that ordinary citizens can assist law enforcement in a variety of supporting roles. Concluding the first day, Dr. Parham Jaber, the Regional Medical Director

for Region 9 of the Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, spoke about the possibility of pandemic flu. Dr. Jaber recounted the history of recent outbreaks of pandemic flu, and explained the difference between an epidemic and a pandemic, in which an expansive, prolonged infection kills millions.

On the second day, Nicholas Auck initiated a brainstorming session, in which he asked each individual in the room for ideas for a given Citizen Corps program.

Among the many suggestions taken, a few included using VIPS members to take misdemeanor reports, encouraging senior citizens to participate in USA on Watch, recruiting for CERT on campus, and promoting the use of HAM radio operators to ensure uninterrupted communications. Next, Tuesday Mills from the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness of East Baton Rouge Parish moderated a roundtable discussion on the basics of starting a CERT program. After the roundtable concluded, Mardrah Starks from the newly formed Louisiana Volunteers in Action (LAVA) explained her program's function in recruiting volunteers for existing agencies and organizations. Nicholas Auck and Lisa Carmack, Region VII Coordinator for the Governor's Office of Homeland Security, next offered a look at CERT program management.

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Auck and Carmack explained that many CERT coordinators are assigned the job in addition to their primary responsibilities in law enforcement or emergency management. Many learn to manage the program through trial and error, and are often unaware of the many challenges that arise when working with volunteers. But, with those challenges comes the benefits of a versatile team that can assist emergency management and the community at large. Carmack continued with her own presentation on developing a Citizen Corps program, including CERT and the other four components. She emphasized that there is no single way to conduct a Citizen Corps program, and that each jurisdiction has its own needs.

Orleans Parish CERT Commander Eric Pickering and Angela Jouett of the Calcasieu Parish MRC shared real stories of Citizen Corps volunteers helping in disasters. Pickering described CERT's efforts during Katrina, including taking 911 calls and repairing the generator at Charity Hospital. Jouett talked about helping to shelter evacuees in Cameron Parish. Rita Massey

of Union Parish described the transition of its Senior Patrol to a full time VIPS program with more responsibilities, such as ticketing and patrolling the parking lot during football games.

D. Casey Levy of the State Hazard Mitigation Program described the Governor's Office of Homeland Security's \$25 million education and outreach effort. Levy discussed how parishes could apply for money to promote disaster mitigation, which he defined as sustained efforts to prevent damage. He said that eligible expenses include structural elevations and "safe rooms." With Louisiana being the lead nation in flood claims to the National Flood Insurance Program, the Hazard Mitigation Program could provide much needed assistance to parishes in need.

There was also a discussion of FEMA's Community Education and Outreach program, which aims to create a culture of preparedness. By promoting personal responsibility, the program prepares citizens for all-hazard events.

Nicholas Auck concluded the second day of the conference by addressing the concerns of members of individual parishes over

the new grant awarding process. Given the new application for the annual Citizen Corps Program grant, many local councils had questions, which Auck duly addressed. The second and third days of the conference were devoted to the

nine-unit CERT course, taught by members from parish councils from all over the state.

### **Activities Abound for the Calcasieu Medical Reserve Team**

The months of April and May have been very active for the Calcasieu Medical Reserve team. The month began with Operation Prepare. The Calcasieu Public Safety Communications 911 collaborated with the Calcasieu MRC and Office of Public Health. Local members of the community were called while the volunteers updated their information. There were 945 calls made in the SNAP program. Volunteers also packed 600 bags with information on how to join the SNAP program, which were distributed to area agencies. Volunteers also participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Baby Fair on May 10<sup>th</sup> at the Women and Children's Hospital. Bags containing family preparedness and safety information were distributed to new parents as well as members from the community. National Volunteer Day was celebrated by having a volunteer booth at the Prien Lake Mall alongside other volunteer agencies in the area. Members passed out bags filled with preparedness material and talked to customers about the CMRC. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, members participated in a walk-through at the Lake Charles Civic Center in preparation for an evacuation. They were provided with Triage Forms to be used for Bus Triage as well as on-site training for future events. On May 21<sup>st</sup>, members participated in a health fair at the Factory Outlet Store in Iowa, LA. CMRC also recently purchased a 12-foot covered trailer to haul emergency supplies in an event. The trailer is equipped with gear for members. CMRC has many more opportunities available in the future and for the upcoming hurricane season.

## Orleans Parish CERT Expands Education and Outreach in 2008



Changing times in the City of New Orleans have brought both hardship and opportunity to a select segment of local volunteers. The New Orleans Community Emergency Response Team, (CERT), is a body of volunteers devoted to serving their city and region in times of disaster. The organization, which began local activities in 2002, was formed as part of President Bush's mandate for the formation of a Citizen Corps following September 11, 2001. Under the leadership of CERT Commander Jason Higginbotham, its ranks

had swollen to more than 80 volunteers before Katrina decimated its numbers. But this diehard group, although smaller, has reinvigorated itself with a passion for service in the post-Katrina community by promoting its message of emergency preparedness, neighborhood involvement, and leadership.

Pre-Katrina, CERT offered a number of programs to volunteers, including amateur HAM radio licensing, first aid training, and the ability to work with local emergency management offi-

cials during key events in New Orleans. Activities involved assisting in manning the emergency operations center (EOC) during Mardi Gras, providing outreach at Jazzfest, and answering phones and operating communications at the EOC during hurricane evacuations. In addition to formal training, volunteers brought with them life experience in trade industries, security, law, medicine, and a number of other disciplines.

During Katrina the value of the program was self-evident, as CERT

stepped up to the plate and took on responsibilities they never dreamed they'd have to.

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**Tangipahoa Parish will hold a CERT training on June 12th and 13th at Southeastern Louisiana University. For more information, please contact Carol New at (985) 748-3211 or Dr. Stuart Stewart at (985) 974-7976**

## Campus CERT Training in East Baton Rouge Parish

On April 28-29<sup>th</sup>, the East Baton Rouge Parish Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness held its first Campus CERT training and exercise in conjunction with the Louisiana Campus Compact. The training included participants from local colleges such as Louisiana Technical College – Baton Rouge, Rapides Parish Community College, Our Lady of the Lake College, Southern University, and many more. The participants gained valuable knowledge in order to prepare their campus police and public safety personnel to recruit, train, and lead sustainable campus CERT teams. We would like to thank Campus Compact and Southern University for supplying trainers as well as supplies. The next CERT Training will be held for the Country Club of Louisiana; final dates have not been set, but will be issued at a later time.

At the National Hurricane Conference held in Orlando, FL, JoAnne Moreau, Director of the EBRP Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness, received a National award for implementing the Junior CERT program. In an effort to reach young and disabled individuals about emergency preparedness, the program taught over 800 students over the summer and early fall. Junior CERT will kick-off again this summer, using programs such as BREC, Boys & Girls Club of B.R., Big Buddy, YWCA, and many more.

## Looking Ahead to 2008

2008 is shaping up to be a great year for Citizen Corps in Louisiana. We have seen record participation in all our programs and have a strong State Council that continues to lead all of our parishes along the road to preparedness. This year has seen our first newsletter published, bringing you Citizen Corps news every quarter. We also intend to introduce legislation that will provide State funding for Citizen Corps programs. As you've read here, not only has the Louisiana State Citizen Corps Council held two successful conferences, but by the time you read this, the first CERT Rodeo will be underway.

As Katrina and Rita showed, you can never be too prepared. Fire, Police and Sheriff and EMS departments throughout the State are beginning to embrace Citizen Corps volunteers and recognize what a valuable asset they can be. Thanks to all of you who made 2007 a success, and to all of you who will make 2008 even better!

Eric Pickering  
State Citizen Corps Council Chair

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During that time of trial, CERT members took the initiative to repair generators at City Hall and Charity Hospital, perform boat rescues, and answer 911 calls. For their bravery during Katrina, a number of CERT members were commended by the New Orleans City Council.

Experience has taught Orleans Parish CERT that it can do great things. Renewed interest from local and federal Homeland Security officials has propelled CERT to begin recruiting and training new volunteers to assist in future crises. In addition, plans are underway to offer CERT training to businesses, schools, churches, and nonprofit agencies. With the assistance of the New Orleans Fire Department, Orleans Parish CERT can conduct its unique emergency preparedness classes during working hours. This will significantly increase the number of trained citizens for 2008.

CERT continues its mission as a support team for the City-Assisted Evacuation, and supporting the New Orleans Emergency Operations Center. If you'd like to be a part of this effort, call the City Office of Emergency Preparedness at 504-658-8700 and ask how you can become a CERT volunteer.

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